

A feisty female soldier in  
Napoleon's army

# Ironhead

JEAN-CLAUDE VAN RIJCKEGHEM

Stans is eighteen and far too mouthy for a girl. Her younger brother Pier is a sanctimonious swot who, acting as a chaperone, desperately tries to keep his sister under control. Their father is an inventor with money problems, and in Ghent in 1808 a daughter is the perfect collateral for a big loan from a rich money lender. Stans's fate appears to be sealed and her freedom a thing of the past.

Until one night, dressed in her husband's clothes, she escapes and takes the place of a conscript in Napoleon's army. Her husband views her disappearance as a breach of contract, so Stans and Pier's father ends up behind bars. Pier thinks he knows where his wayward sister is, and goes off in search of her. But Stans has never felt more at home than she does at the Fourteenth Company.

**His language roars, rumbles and crackles. Only a born storyteller can write like this.**

NRC HANDELSBLAD

In the figure of the wonderfully defiant Stans, Jean-Claude van Rijckeghem has created an unforgettable character, and thus subtly brings topical issues such as gender and identity into an extremely convincing historical setting. Ghent, Paris, Vienna and the battlefields near the Danube come to life in his sensuous language, so much so that the reader can smell the blood, taste the beer and feel the cannons in his belly.

**Rowdy and contemplative in turn, this celebration of historical gender nonconformity is as compelling as it is fun**

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## AUTHOR



Jean-Claude van Rijckeghem (b. 1963) has written and produced many feature films in Belgium, including the Cannes Critics' Week winner 'Moscow, Belgium'. For some time, he and Pat Van Beirs formed a successful writing duo that created acclaimed and prize-winning historical novels. Ironhead marked the start of a successful solo writing career. Van Rijckeghem is widely praised for his vibrant language and his ability to bring the past to life. Photo © Koen Broos

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**TRANSLATION RIGHTS** Lucienne van der Leije - l.van.der.leije@singeluitgeverijen.nl

**TRANSLATION GRANTS** Lien Devos - lien.d@flandersliterature.be